



The Audience: Engage them or lose them!

by Mohamed Isa

Have you experienced this before? You attend a conference with excitement to gain practical insights to improve your skills only to find the speakers are boring to death. I bet you did. This is a common phenomenon. The speakers may have prepared the content and slides diligently but they forgot about the importance of connecting with the audience and engaging them throughout their talk. Here are seven techniques to avoid this trap.

Meet & Greet. Arrive early at the venue. Meet & greet delegates as they arrive. Strike genuine conversations with them. Be interested in what they have to say. Show them you care, otherwise they will not care later on what you have to say. Pay attention to their statements as they might be relevant to your talk and use them in your talk. They will love you for that. And they will connect better throughout your speech.

Introduction. If you will be introduced to the audience, and you should insist on

this, create an interesting introduction to the audience to get them excited about your talk. To make it even better, plant some humor within it. In your introduction, do not boast about your achievements in terms of qualifications and experience, the audience will not relate to you. Establish credibility and then move on to explain why your talk will be important and valuable for the audience.

Pause. When you take the stage to speak, do not speak: Pause. A pause will draw the audience to you. When they suddenly feel the silence at the venue, they are bound to look at the stage and end their preoccupations whether with their fellow delegates or your arch enemy: Their Smart Phones. In addition, before saying something important, pause. And when you say it, pause. By doing this, you will give the audience a chance to think about what you said and be more engaged.

Questions. Ask the audience questions to draw on their experience. You throw a

question and have one or few delegates answer it. If you are not comfortable doing this, plan ahead. Agree with one delegate to answer and once he or she does that, complement them by a round of applause. In addition, you may consider giving out awards like books or coffee mugs to make it more fun. This act will encourage more delegates to participate. This will create more audience engagement.

Discussions. Discussions can take the audience engagement to a higher level. It is simple and effective. Ask the audience to discuss a topic with each other; provide them with a specific timeframe. After that, ask them to share their thoughts with the entire delegates by handing to them the microphone. This two-level discussion builds the confidence of the delegates to share their thoughts with other delegates because they just shared them with other delegates.

Polls. The first time I saw polls being used was at the National Speakers Association (NSA) Annual Conference. It was simple, interactive and fun! We were asked to follow a link on the screen to vote for the best humorous speakers at NSA. And as we voted, we saw the votes being calibrated on the screen. We were not only engaged but we also had a lot fun. Google live polling websites or apps to find a suitable one for you. Polls are a great way to engage the audience. Use them.

These were seven simple techniques to engage your audience at a higher level. You do not have to ask them to close their eyes and imagine their perfect day or play loud music and ask the audience to dance over the tables to get them engaged. Keep it simple and focused to keep them engaged. And remember, if you do not engage them, you will lose them! ©



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